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Between the Secular and the Sacred: Emotive Responses at The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum

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Between the Secular and the Sacred: Emotive Responses at The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum

by

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my husband, Robby, who has been my port in the storm since I met him so many years ago. Without his loving dedication, encouragement, and understanding I would not be the person I am today. Thank you for always being there and pushing me to explore my dreams. I would also like to dedicate this work to myself, for never giving up and proving to myself that I can do something amazing.

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Abstract

Between the Secular and the Sacred: Emotive Responses at The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum

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The focus of this research study was to determine the nature of the experiences visitors have at The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum in Houston, Texas. In order to discover these experiences visitors have in the space I conducted a phenomenological research study by interviewing eleven people at the Chapel and asking them to recount their experiences inside the space. Phenomenology enables the collection of rich description of the visitors' experiences. To gather the data I used the methodology of narrative inquiry in an effort to accurately depict the participants' stories about their experiences. The narratives I collected at the Chapel demonstrated that the space is one that provides an evocative learning experience rather than one that is informative. I found that there were a range of experiences in the space that related to the previous experiences or knowledge that visitors brought with them to the Chapel.

The motivations for this study came from my own experience with the space before I started my graduate studies. However, during the course of this study it became

clear that there is a lack of knowledge about visitors' responses to The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum. The results of this study benefit the field of museum education by making a case for recognizing spaces that provide opportunities for evocative learning, rather than viewing them as purely informative.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When I started my journey through graduate school I already had an interest in museum spaces and the effects these spaces have on the visitor. Carol Duncan (1991) writes about museums as ritual spaces and links them to churches and temples. She also states that the display of the objects in these institutions "carries out broad…political and ideological tasks" (p. 90). In this article Duncan represents museums as having a great amount of power and control over the community they represent as well as the communities they serve. I have come to realize that I am very interested in power relationships, so after reading Duncan's writings I was hooked. I came into graduate school knowing I wanted to investigate museum spaces and the effects they have on visitors.

Knowing that I wanted to investigate the effect museum spaces have on people I drew upon my own experiences inside museums and concluded that The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum in Houston, Texas was an ideal choice for my research study. The BFCM[1] is a place that displays 13th century Eastern Orthodox frescoes and icons. The space where they are displayed is a recreation of the original chapel in Lysi where the objects were housed. This is a space that is sacred, because it is a consecrated religious space, but it is also secular in that it is a museum. I had visited the BFCM during my college years and was deeply moved by the Chapel and intrigued by the in-betweenness it occupies by being a chapel and a museum at the same time. The very strong feelings I experienced in the space made me question if this powerful response could be influential to learning inside the BFCM. I found myself wondering if other

[1] The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum will be referred to as BFCM from this point forward in this report.

people experienced similar responses. Most importantly, could such a strong response be evoked in other museum spaces?

This research is significant to the field of museum education because as of the writing of this thesis only a short amount of time remains to study this space before these objects go back to Lysi later this year. The research may also demonstrate how a space like the BFCM creates a museum environment that demands a different approach to museum education. The space of the Chapel Museum is one that evoked in me a response I had never experienced before. This made me curious about the effects of museum spaces on visitors' experiences. By studying the responses elicited by the BFCM, the field of museum education can be enriched regarding how strong, powerful experiences in museums can be related to learning within other museum spaces.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What kinds of responses are elicited by The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum? What do these responses reveal regarding the power of the space to enable personal connections? What is the significance of these experiences for museum education?

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL MOTIVATIONS

I want to answer these central research questions in order to contribute to our understanding of the ways people learn in museum spaces. By doing so, I aim to further the base of knowledge held by museum educators by helping them to understand how evocative responses to a museum space contribute to the visitor's experience. Through describing the experiences visitors have in the BFCM we can better serve the visitors who stroll into the museum on their own or in small groups, rather than in a docent led tour. This research can open up the discussion about how museum spaces can be evocative, as well as informative. This means that there is the opportunity for museum

education to be evocative, in that it can elicit from within the visitor an emotional response, which can then lean to making connections to the artworks.

PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS: NOT SO LONG AGO A RESEARCH STUDY IS BORN

During my second semester in graduate school I had the opportunity to take a class that was meant to prepare us for writing our thesis proposals. One of the first assignments was to simply write a few sentences about what we were interested in. I entered graduate school with an interest in museum spaces and the effects these spaces have on visitors and their learning. So, for the first assignment I wrote about how I was interested in museum spaces and that I would like to know more about them. As the semester went on we were challenged to narrow our topics to a manageable subject matter and for me that meant picking a site in which to conduct my research study. I knew that I wanted to investigate a museum where an effort had been made to do something different with the space used for the display of art objects. There was only one I could think of: The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum in Houston, Texas.

The BFCM is a museum space unlike any other I have visited. I found that throughout my first year in graduate school this museum kept finding its way into my presentations and papers. I had visited this museum during my time as an undergraduate student at The University of Texas at Austin (UT) with an art history class, and there was something about my experience inside the chapel/museum that stayed with me.

A Lasting Experience: My Day at The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum

In my previous life as an Art History undergraduate student at UT I was not even aware of museum education. I assume that I knew there were wall panels, pamphlets, and docent tours at a museum, but that was the extent of what I knew of museum education. During a spring semester art history class on Byzantine Art, my professor organized a trip

to Houston to visit The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum. Like almost all my classmates, I had never been to this museum, but was intrigued by my professor's description of the objects we would see.

It was a cold and rainy Saturday morning when we all met on campus to make the drive to Houston. Our professor had rented a van and we piled in ready to become quite familiar with one another on the long drive to Houston. The drive was uneventful and other than the sound of a Canadian radio station, which our professor had found on satellite radio, the car trip was relatively quiet. After a little over two hours we found ourselves driving through a neighborhood of quaint houses along a tree lined road. The van pulled into a small parking lot in front of a medium sized white block of a building. This did not look like any museum I had ever seen, but my professor announced that we had arrived at our destination.

After stretching our legs we walked towards the building and pulled open the heavy wood doors to find a small corridor lined on one side by a stone wall. As our professor greeted the guards we stood milling around the entryway and were then told by our professor to follow. We were led through a small doorway into a tiny foyer space. There was a sign that said to stop and wait for our eyes to adjust to the low light, so each one of us paused and waited for a few seconds before we proceed into the main room of the museum. As I stood there I saw a sight I had never witnessed before: a 13th century chapel building.

Of course, the building did not look like it came out of the 13th century; it was made of panels of glass, but the space made me feel like I had been transported back to another time and place. As I moved into the chapel proper I was overcome with the way the light from the tall oil lamps bounced off the icons making them look so lifelike, as if they were moving ever so slightly. Slowly I let my eyes move up the wall to the small

fresco behind the altar and I was struck by the beauty of this piece. I did not linger there too long before the large fresco on the ceiling captured my attention. In the center of this fresco is a Christ figure that is larger than life, whose eyes seem to follow you wherever you stand. As I stood there with my head tilted all the way back in a very uncomfortable position I felt a sense of awe that I had never experienced in my life. I would say that I am not a religious person, and even though I spent most Sundays in church growing up, I had never felt a powerful reaction like this to a religious artwork. To be in this small and intimate chapel with the low flickering lighting, and to be faced in such close proximity to the low ceiling with an imposing Christ figure above me, I felt a connection to this place and to this artwork that was very strong.

These feelings of awe were so powerful that in the years since then I find myself constantly coming back to the memory of that day with a fondness for being overwhelmed by something unexpected. I went into that field trip thinking that I would spend the day in Houston, earn some extra credit, and look at some Byzantine art. I never expected that I would have such a lasting reaction to this museum space and that years later I would return to conduct my master's thesis research there. Now, I wonder how I as a museum educator might be able to provide visitors a similar kind of powerful response in the spaces of the museums in which I will work.

SPECULATION ABOUT THE INVESTIGATION

Going into my research, I hypothesized that through my investigation I would discover that it is likely for people to make lasting connections with works of art when they have strong responses to either the works themselves or to the environment in which these works are housed. I also foresaw that this research project would give me insight into how the walk-in visitors, those not on tours, interact with the artwork and the unique museum space of The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum.

RESEARCH METHODS

As will be detailed in Chapter 3, to answer my central research questions I employed the qualitative research method of phenomenology. My first research question, "What types of responses are elicited by the BFCM?" is best served by phenomenology, which is the study of an experience "from the perspective of the individual" (Lester, 1999, p. 1). In this study what I attempted to determine and describe is the phenomenon of experiences visitors have at the Chapel Museum. According to Stake (2010), observation and interview are the most common tools used by researcher in a qualitative research study. To gather accurate descriptions of the experiences of visitors at the BFCM, I interviewed visitors that I audio recorded, as well as took notes in a field journal.

To analyze the data I collected at the BFCM I chose to use the research method of narrative inquiry. I wanted the visitors' own words to tell the stories collected at the BFCM. Using narrative inquiry enabled me to do that because narrative "speaks to the particularities rather than the generalities of people's lives" and this study aims to get at the particular responses visitors have inside the BFCM (Reed & Speedy, 2001, p. 110). This research methodology was utilized to capture the in-betweeness of this chapel/museum and all of the hard to define and describe nuances that occur in it.

The data analysis chapter of this study is comprised of the individual narratives collected at the BFCM, which are categorized into the three dimensions of narrative inquiry; place, social, and temporal, which are described by Clandinin, Huber, Steeves, and Li (2001). I used narrative analysis to gain as full as possible an understanding of the visitors' stories as related to their experiences at the BFCM. Using the method of phenomenology as a framework, with interviews to gather data, and narrative as a means

to analyze that data, I was able to describe the types of experiences visitors had at the BFCM.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum: located in Houston, Texas, The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum is a small museum space that is part of the Menil Collection and located in a separate building from the main museum structure.

Liminal Space: According to Victor Turner (1969) the "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial [objectives]" (p. 95). Museum spaces are liminal in that they house objects that are of the past, but are here in the present.

White Cube: O'Dougherty (1999) describes the typical 20th century museum space as: "a white ideal space that, more than any single picture, may be the archetypal image of twentieth century art; it clarifies itself through a process of historical inevitability usually attached to the art it contains"(p. 14). In other words, the modern museum building is just as much an example of modern art as the pictures hanging on the walls. The building and the art are linked in modernist ideology. This type of museum space is usually associated with the rise of modernism and as an appropriate space to display modern art, which is in contrast to the BFCM whose designers strove to contextualize the artworks by displaying the 13th century frescoes and icons in a structure that mimics, in form and function, their original setting.

Simulacrum: a simulated space, one that attempts to contextualize the objects. In this study the BFCM is categorized as such a space. According to Jean Baudrillard (1984) a simulacrum is "substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (p. 254). In the case of The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum, the glass structure is a substitution for the original structure in Lysi, which creates a simulacrum.

Three Dimensions of Narrative Inquiry: According to Clandinin, Huber, Steeves, and Li (2011), there are three dimensions of narrative inquiry; place, social, and temporal. The place has to do with the setting of the narrative, the social is comprised of all interactions with both the inner and outer self in the narrative, and the temporal is concerned with the past, present, and future in the narrative.

LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

This research study was a qualitative study that examined the experiences of people who visited the BFCM in Houston, Texas and was not a longitudinal study. This research project took place during one day at the BFCM, in which I interviewed visitors as they were leaving the Chapel.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

I believe this research will have benefits in the field of museum education because we are always striving to discover different ways in which people make connections to works of art. I believe that the power of the experience elicited at the BFCM is a one that should be studied to understand how evocative experiences influence learning in museum spaces. If I could shed light through my research on how the individual's experience in a museum space is related to their ability to internalize and make a personal connection, then the world of museum education could be benefited through this.

LOOKING AHEAD

In the following pages I set out to answer my three central research questions outlined earlier in this chapter. I begin, in Chapter 2 with a review of the pertinent literature to my study, which consists of a discussion of space, learning and liminality, followed by a discussion of objects in their spaces and the museum as a simulacrum, or a simulated space. Finally, I present an in-depth look at the BFCM, which is compared and

contrasted with a modernist museum space. Chapter 3 picks up the discussion of my research methodologies with an in-depth look at how the study was carried out and a discussion of phenomenology and the ways narrative inquiry was used to effectively analyze the data. In Chapter 4 I tell the participant's stories in their own words so the reader gains a feel for each individual experience collected in this study. Chapter 4 also presents patterns and commonalities, which emerged within these stories. These common threads are then discussed regarding how the visitor's responses enable personal connections in the BFCM space. The thesis closes with an interpretive discussion of these experiences and their pertinence to the field of museum education in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In relation to museums at large, The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum in Houston, Texas is an engaging case. This museum space is situated at the intersection of many realms, and occupies a special in-betweeness. This place that the BFCM occupies is one that is in-between the sacred and the secular, as it is both a church and a museum. Through the course of my research study I attempted to describe the reactions people have to the space and the relationship those reactions have to learning in the space. The BFCM is a space that was conceived very deliberately by Dominique de Menil to be one that included both the sacred and the secular, resulting in a space that is liminal or between the literal and the spiritual.

The BFCM is situated somewhere between the sacred and the secular. In its name alone it has the words chapel and museum. This is a reflection of Dominique de Menil's desire that the place serve a double function. She wanted this space to celebrate the frescoes and icons for their spiritual value as well as their artistic merit. The museum was consecrated by the Eastern Orthodox Church, thereby serving a real liturgical function while at the same time acting as a museum complete with pamphlets and security guards (The Menil Collection, 2008).

The in-betweeness created by occupying both the realm of the sacred and the secular causes visitors to the BFCM to simultaneously be in a literal and a liminal space. Literally, the visitors are in a museum, in Houston, Texas in the year 2011, but the deliberate reconstruction of the original church space causes the visitor to be transported to a small chapel in Lysi, Cyprus, in the 13th century.

In this chapter I discuss museum spaces in general terms and how they relate to the BFCM in regards to learning and liminality. Then I will discuss objects in museum

spaces and the ways in which museums can be seen as simulacrums, or simulated spaces. Finally, I will discuss how the BFCM specifically relates to the topics of museum space, and the learning that occurs in museum spaces.

SPACE, LEARNING, AND LIMINALITY IN THE MUSEUM

In Falk and Dierking's (2002) *Lessons Without Limits*, the effects of the physical environment on learning is discussed. They assert that "where you are does affect how and what you learn" (p. 53). Interestingly, studies on learning usually ignore the setting, the physical environment, where learning takes place. Falk and Dierking (2002) explain that physical surroundings greatly affect learning; this includes everything from the temperature inside the space to the color of the walls. Spaces seem to play the greatest role in the ways people learn, as opposed to the others factors such as the objects on the walls. According to Falk and Dierking's (2002) data, an effective space for learning tends to be a "well lit building with large, vaulted ceilings or huge atriums," such as a museum (p. 54). Falk and Dierking (2002) state the reason people like spaces such as these are because the grand scale imitates nature and as humans we have feelings of "awe and inspiration" when viewing large spaces in nature (p. 54). However, the museum space with its large rooms and tall ceilings can feel overwhelming to others, which counters the notion of museums as effective learning spaces.

A well planned space serves to enhance the learning experience, and "the more appropriate the physical setting to what is being learned, the more meaningful the learning that results" from the overall experience (Falk & Dierking, 2002, p. 55). The context in which learning occurs is important "because it enriches and strengthens learning, and because it makes learning easier" (p. 55). Therefore, according to Falk and Dierking (2002), if an object in a museum is displayed in a way that captures the original

context of the object, learners are going to have an easier time making meaningful connections between the artwork and their own lives while in the gallery.

One way for visitors to successfully make meaning is to have what is called a "flow experience" by Csiksezentmihalyi and Hermanson (1995) in *Intrinsic Motivations in Museums: What Makes Visitors Want to Learn?* A flow experience is one "in which people are willing to invest psychic energy in tasks for which extrinsic rewards are absent" (p. 36). In the flow state visitors get swept away by the experience and become oblivious to things like time or fatigue, therefore the experience creates a depth that is rewarded intrinsically rather than extrinsically. When a visitor in a museum has a sense of intrinsic reward, it is more likely that learning can take place inside the space. An example of an intrinsic motivation that can arise in the art museum is one that drives the visitor to learn more about an object on their own. This drive will cause them to seek out more information until their thirst to know more is quenched.

To create a flow experience certain conditions must be met. First, the visitor must be intrinsically motivated. In other words, learning in the museum is not rewarded by an outside source so there must be a great deal of choice involved for the visitor; choosing which objects to look at and for how long is a way museum staffs can meet this goal (Csiksezentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995). Second, the display must entice "curiosity and interest" in the visitor so they will choose to invest their time "long enough for positive and intellectual or emotional changes to occur" (Csiksezentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995, p. 36). To spark the visitor's curiosity careful attention by museum staff should be applied to the museum display space. Third, in an ideal situation the visitor should have clear goals and expectations for their visit to the museum. In institutions like schools it is easy for people to have clear goals and expectations that come from an outside source (i.e., to get good grades you must study). However, at the museum it may be difficult to

offer the visitor clear goals for a particular exhibition. By providing such goals museum staff can help take the anxiety out of a trip to the museum. This causes the visitor to better enjoy the museum allowing greater opportunity for the flow experience to take over (Csiksezentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995). Fourth, the display should address a "broad range of visitor skills" in that it speaks to the art historian as well as the novice (Csiksezentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995, p. 38). Lastly, to create a flow experience "the visitor must be able to concentrate and devote full attention to the given exhibit or activity" (Csiksezentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995, p. 38). Falk and Dierking (2002) state that a well planned museum space, with a proper setting with regards to the objects on display will encourage a better learning environment. This occurs because the visitor is able to shut out the outside world and become immersed in the exhibition, resulting in a flow experience. Without these five things met, it is unlikely that an intrinsically motivated flow experience will occur and even less likely for learning to happen in a place such as a museum.

These criteria for a flow experience are a formula for the best kind of museum practice; much like Falk and Dierking's (2002) discussion of space sets up a similar set of criteria that result in learning. Csiksezentmihalyi and Hermanson (1995) acknowledge the fact that there is a lack of data about museum visitors and how they learn. They advocate for more research of museum visitors and stress that "it is important to remain flexible in one's policies, so that mistakes can be corrected swiftly, and that one can build on successes" using the generation of flow experiences as the goal for learning in the museum (Csiksezentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995, p. 61). In this study where I am attempting to determine people's responses to the BFCM and then relate those experiences to learning in the space, a flow experience may indicate that the Chapel has significant learning potential for visitors.

In Morales' (2007) *Colliding Sensibilities: Exhibition Development and the Pedagogy of Period Room Interpretation*, the author discusses period rooms and how they can be a form of narrative, and how this is applicable in the "new" museum, which is a museum that is more concerned with meaning making instead of disseminating knowledge. Museum staff who work in these new museum spaces understand that objects get their value and ideas from the narratives formed by the space that surrounds them. Morales (2007) wonders how these objects that are stuck in time can speak to a modern audience. She answers this question by explaining that the space must in some way connect to our modern lives so that the visitor can make these connections by being able to experience the contextualized space.

As museum educators we strive to help visitors make meaning through interpretation and "vital to interpretation is that it reflects visitors' lived experience" (Morales, 2007, p. 63). Period rooms, and other spaces like the BFCM, are doorways to the past that can transport the viewer to a different place and time to aid in the meaning making process. In the case of the BFCM, it connects to the present because this version is not located geographically in Lysi, it has been reconstructed in Houston, Texas. It lives in the past, but also in our present. The BFCM is like a period room in that it aims to contextualize the objects it houses in time and space. The frescoes and icons are situated in a way that recalls their original proximity to one another and to the viewer in the same way that a period room aims to transport the visitor to another place in time in order to better understand the objects on display. According to Morales (2007), "interpretation is a process that places an educator in the role of a carpenter who must craft designs and build structure to support visitors. "It is a role that facilitates the production of meaning" (p. 67). Visitors must be provoked and stimulated to make meaning, and one way of accomplishing this is to construct a simulacrum, or a simulated space, that recreates the

objects' original contextual environment. By creating a contextual space that is different from a typical museum display it helps the visitor to secure a feeling of what the objects were originally intended for by experiencing them as people would have done so in the 13th century. This is especially true in the BFCM because the space is constructed in a way that puts the visitor in close proximity to the objects in a manner that is true to the original intentions of the frescoes and icons.

In DeLosso's (2010), *A Phenomenon of Thought: Liminal Theory in the Museum*, she discusses the ways in which liminal theory can be applied to the interaction between museum docents and visitors. She states "when applied to the art museum, I argue that the liminal is a zone of negotiation that can assist in transformation and personal meaning making" (p. vii). According to Victor Turner (1969) in *Ritual Process*, "liminal entities are neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between" (p. 95). Like Falk and Dierking (2002), DeLosso (2010) believes there is "a relationship between space and education" (p. 7). Through her research of the liminal, DeLosso (2010) concludes that the liminal "is not relegated to one space or another, it is physically and metaphorically between juxtaposed aspects of rituals and culture" (p. 16). So too is the BFCM, for it is situated between the sacred and the secular. It occupies the realm of the museum while simultaneously occupying the realm of a chapel. While DeLosso places the phenomenon of thought in this liminal space, I argue that emotions are produced in this same space between the physical and the cognitive. When a person makes an emotional connection to something it is more likely they will be intrinsically motivated and according to Csiksezentmihalyi and Hermanson (1995), that is the first thing needed in order to create a flow experience, and visitors who have flow experiences in museum spaces are more likely to learn in those spaces.

This liminality of a space allows for meaning making to occur. DeLosso (2010) claims that "while navigating through the process, one may or may not be cognizant of the changes occurring and the meaning making realized within oneself, until suddenly, there is an epiphany" (pp. 16-17). The type of experience she describes contributes to the "construction of knowledge," which is what museum education strives for.

In Denice Leach's (2007) article "Dynamic Museum Place" she explains how important it is for museum educators to think about and understand the museum as a space (p. 199). However, she makes the point that "describing what the museum is as place is often difficult" (p. 199). It is an oversimplification to classify museum space as simply physical; Leach claims "there seems to be something more to the 'place' of museums that begs to be identified" (p. 200). Our world is made up of both the tangible and the intangible; museums are the spaces where the tangible and intangible places meet. This unique in-betweenness is the tough to describe liminal space to which I have devoted this research project.

Leach (2007) describes the museum space as occupying four domains, both virtual and physical. The first is the origin domain, which is the space the objects come from. Museums allude to this through didactic labels or contextual information, but rarely occupy the origin domain. I argue that because of the effort to contextualize the art objects placing them in an environment very similar to the original one they were intended for, the BFCM attempts to occupy the origin domain. At the very least, the Chapel simulates the origin domain. The second is the creation domain, which exists between the object and the maker; museums almost never occupy this space (Leach, 2007). The third domain is the display domain. This is the physical space the object occupies while on display. According to Leach (2007) "the display domain provides a pivotal connection point to other domains within museum place, allowing educators to

use display place as a means to provide entry to the other domains" (p. 205). This display domain is always present in the museum and is, therefore, also present in the BFCM. The final domain Leach (2007) describes is the experience-object domain where "people have the ability to generate a virtual place where the intangibles of the museum, including memory, learning, and meaning making, come together" to form personal connections (p. 205). This fourth domain is present only in the visitors' minds. This last domain is where people bring their own lived experiences to a place and create meaning for them based on what they experience in the museum space. These four domains come together to form the multi-dimensional museum place and at the point where these spaces meet is the liminal, which is where human experience is created.

OBJECTS IN SPACE AND SIMULACRUM

Regrettably, museums have a difficult job to do when they display objects, especially when these are cultural objects. Chung (2009) outlines these problems in "Presenting Cultural Artifacts in the Art Museum: A University-Museum Collaboration." The first problem encountered is that the museum as an institution tends to tell only one story, which the curators determine is best for the public to know. For many art objects displayed in museums there can be multiple possible stories to tell, but curators decide which story gets told to the audience. In any given exhibition the curator chooses which artworks to include, thereby telling a particular story. In this way art museums can exclude or marginalize whole groups of people while privileging another.

Another problem is that objects are displayed as fine art even if they were intended to be utilitarian objects, thereby changing the original intent of the object. The most significant problem museums face when displaying objects is that the ideology surrounding the creation of the object may clash with that of modern art and modern art museums. For example, a lavish chair from the French Rococo period with gold

embellishments will look out of place displayed in a stark white space that was designed with modern, clean geometric lines in mind. At the BFCM, the Menils tried to overcome this last point by choosing to display the 13th century frescoes and icons in a structure that was built to mimic the original design. This design of a small and intimate space lit by skylights and oil lamps allows the artwork not to be at odds with a contemporary setting fighting with a modern ideology, but rather to be in a place similar to the one they were imagined for by the 13th century creator.

Cote (2003) agrees with Chung in "From Masterpiece to Artifact" when Cote discusses the ways artifacts are displayed and how they become changed as a result of their new life in the museum space. He also discusses notions of how the museum speaks for the object by changing the context. Basically the object has a new and often times different life when it goes on display in the museum. Its use is now changed and its voice is powered by a different institution, the museum. This means that the museum curator has the power to decide how the object is going to be viewed, and therefore what part of the story it is going to help illustrate. This power that museum staffs have over the objects they display can be highly problematic, therefore careful thought should be put into how an object is displayed. Ideally, decisions need to be made about what the proper context for each object should be, however a period room cannot possibly be constructed for each object in the museum so curators should carefully consider how the objects on display will be viewed by the visitor. When museum staffs take the conscious steps to accurately contextualize the objects, enabling the viewer to encounter the objects as they were meant to be seen, then visitors can have a more meaningful experience in the galleries.

Studying objects is a way we learn about the past and in most cases we encounter these objects in museums. Also, displaying these objects in museums is our way of

preserving the past. Schlereth (1985), *in Material Culture: A Research Guide*, describes two types of analysis of objects: synchronic and diachronic analysis. Synchronic analysis of an object is "a descriptive study of objects without reference to time duration or cultural change" (p. 17). In this approach the object is studied with no interference from the people or places the object encountered. In this instance the analyst is only interested in the matter that is the object. By focusing exclusively on the aesthetic characteristics of the object, the function of the object is lost. This approach does not tell the analyst how the object related to the person who created it or about the people who used it. Synchronic analysis tells a small part of the object's history and is not ideal for a well rounded and contextual museum display.

Counter to synchronic analysis is diachronic analysis, which treats objects as "historical data" or "resources that can be considered as being both effects and causes in history" (Schlereth, 1985, p. 17). These differing methods have more to do with the study of objects than the study of art and art museums, but the underlying philosophical ideas of each approach could be evident in the museum display of all objects and therefore useful in the discussion of the BFCM. For example, if an institution is more inclined to be synchronic, then the object is the essential element, therefore the display would highlight only the object. Conversely, if a museum is more diachronic, the display of the object might contain elements that give the visitor contextual clues about the time and place of the object. In its deliberate construction of a Chapel to house the 13th century frescoes and icons, the BFCM embraces a diachronic display philosophy.

In Leinherdt and Crowley's (2002) "Objects of Learning, Objects of Talk: Changing Minds in Museums," the authors discuss the idea that objects do not speak for themselves, but rather that the environment and context they are placed in does the talking. At the BFCM, the objects are put in a context that tells the story of their original

function as religious objects. The display space that simulates the original chapel in Lysi coupled with the dramatic lighting caused by oil lamps creates a mood similar to what the original chapel would have felt like to visitors. By entering a space that is very different from the outside world, museum visitors are transported to this simulated 13th century chapel and are able to experience the frescoes and icons in a way similar to people in the 13th century.

In the book *Museum Exhibition, Theory and Practice*, Dean (1996) advises museums to "arrange objects in contextual settings; provide a framework for objects that will assist the visitor in learning about them" (p. 31). This is what the BFCM in Houston does. The Menils have reconstructed the space so that the objects are in their original configuration and arranged in such a way as to attempt to hold onto their spiritual function within the context of the time.

In Branham's (1994/1995) article "Sacrality and Aura in The Museum: Mute Objects and Articulate Space," the author discusses the problematic position museums are in as institutions that display ritual objects. The dilemma is that these objects are taken out of their original context and placed in a space foreign to them; however, attempts to contextualize the museum environment and restore the objects' "aura" or emotional presence can prove to be a difficult and unrewarding task. A successful example of a museum that overcomes this dilemma is the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. At this museum the visitor is taken on an emotional journey through the life experiences of a holocaust victim with the aid of historically accurate objects, buildings, and even a train car.

Branham (1994/1995) directly addresses what happens when a museum reconstructs a religious space that once surrounded a religious object. Branham suggests that when a space is successfully constructed around a particular object, viewers are more

likely to have a meaningful experience. At the BFCM, where a religious space is reconstructed to house the religious objects, the visitors can take away a realistic idea of how the frescoes and icons functioned as they were meant to when they were created in the 13th century. In this kind of museum space visitors will be able to make more clear connections to the original intent of the artwork on display.

In Conn's (2010) *Do Museums Still Need Objects*?, the author is interested in exploring the role objects play in the museum as well as the ideas that the museum staff communicate to the public through these selected objects. The author tackles the ways in which museums approach architectural space and how the mores in the museum world have changed over time, how the modernist approach to space came into fashion, and how other types of space (i.e., the simulacrum or simulated space) can be beneficial to the object. Conn (2010) states that in the modern era the museum building itself has become on art object with similar formal and aesthetic qualities to works of art. In a time when the art museum itself has become an art object it can be difficult for the visitor to clearly discern what is the art that is meant to be on the walls and what is the art that is not. With its clean geometric lines on the outside and the attention to symbolic detail in the reconstruction of the chapel structure using opaque panels of glass, the BFCM would be considered an art object if one was to analyze the formal elements of the structure. The building itself could be analyzed in terms of formal design elements such as line, color, shape, or rhythm. This artfully created building and recreation of the chapel, as a simulated space, could also be called a simulacrum.

In Baudrillard's (1994) "The Precession of Simulacra," the philosopher describes the ways in which our world is a simulation of the true. He says that "to simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't" (p. 254). Baudrillard overlays the construct of the simulacrum upon religion, objects, economics, politics, Disneyland, Los Angles, reality

TV, and even works of art and art museums. Baudrillard's theories are multifaceted. He states that a simulacrum creates aspects of real things; therefore, on some level the simulacrum becomes true. In other words, in every simulacrum there is some kernel of truth in the recreation of a real thing. To extend the frame of the simulacra further, Baudrillard argues that religious works of art, like Byzantine frescoes and 13th century paintings, are a simulacrum because they are only models of the true things they represent. A painting or a photograph is just a simulacrum of the person, place, or object represented. Therefore, according to Baudrillard, the works of art that are housed in the museum are simulacra because paintings are just a simulated version of the real, which are situated in a simulacrum that is the museum space. Furthermore if the signs and symbols used to create the simulacrum are the same as the "real," then what is it that separates the real from the simulated? The opaque glass used to recreate the Chapel is the simulacrum. But, is it less real then the materials of the original structure? Does the simulacrum become real, or was the real ever real at all? This is a virtual space that I am aiming to describe between the real and the simulated; this is a liminal space which is hard to define. This space is somewhere between the simulated and the real; the sacred and the secular is where the BFCM lives and is the space I investigated in this research study.

THE BYZANTINE FRESCO CHAPEL MUSEUM AND MODERNIST MUSEUM SPACE

The Byzantine Fresco Chapel was conceived in 1997 by Dominique de Menil. It is "a manifestation of the redemptive power of art: the chapel was expressly built to house 13thcentury Byzantine frescoes that had been looted from their original home in a small chapel in Lysi, Cyprus" (The Menil Collection, 2008). When de Menil set out to restore the frescoes and build the repository, she wanted a "chapel museum," in that she wanted the objects to retain their spiritual function. The outside structure acts as

"mediation" between the outside world and the objects, while the inside space "echoes the original chapel in Lysi" in that the dome and the apse are in the configuration found at the original site (The Menil Collection, 2008).

In Shakapich's and de Menil's (2004) *Sanctuary: The Spirit in/of Architecture*, the story of the BFCM is told. Dominique de Menil expresses her thoughts on the space and relates that her vision for the chapel is all about "sharing views, sharing religious experiences, sharing social problems" (p. 20). Her thoughts on sharing come from the first known structure that was called a chapel. This chapel was said to have housed a relic of St. Martin, who cut off a piece of his cape to share with a poor man, and upon his death that cape was kept and worshiped by the community. Nora Laos describes the BFCM as a space where frescoes are "eloquently presented in a modern shell of concrete, steel, and glass" (in Shakapich & de Menil, 2004, p. 25). The recreation of the space was to be an abstraction of the original chapel in Lysi, similar in form but using modern materials. The meanings of these objects have changed from strictly religious to that of artwork. The objects have been relocated, both in time and space and because of these changed meanings the space is called the "Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum," in order to highlight that it is both a museum and a chapel. In this way the Chapel occupies an undefined space between museum and church, straddling the sacred and the secular. This liminal, or in-between, place that the BFCM embodies as it straddles the line between the sacred and the secular is what I believe causes visitors to have powerful reactions to the space. In the course of my research study I describe the experiences participants had in the space and examine what significances these experiences have to learning.

The building project for this museum space was undertaken by Francois de Menil, Dominique's son, in 1997. In a letter to him from Dominique, she speaks of the frescoes as having an "intangible element, difficult to weigh and express, yet very real, which is

the frescoes' spiritual importance and their original significance" (Shakapich & de Menil, 2004, p. 49). Francois describes the space as having three layers: the first is the stand alone chapel structure, which resides within the second layer that is called a "lifted box" or "inner liner," and is surrounded by an outer shell of concrete that makes up the third layer. This outer shell of concrete that houses the stand-alone chapel was called an "infinity box" by Dominique de Menil because of the illusion of infinite space created by the dropped ceiling and the two-foot wide skylight that runs along the edge of the room (Shakapich & de Menil, 2004, p. 55). This interaction of the frescoes, the space, and the light is what makes the space spiritual. According to Francois de Menil, the space "had to create a context for the frescoes, reestablishing the spatial relationship between the dome and apse, and it had to have a material expression whose presence would be both surrogate for all that was missing and yet not overpower what remained" (p. 53).

The effort to contextualize the frescoes and icons in the BFCM separates it from a typical museum space where it would be likely to find the icons hung on the wall next to art objects of a similar time period and style. From the beginning of the building project, the Menils knew they needed to create a space that could transcend that of the museum and give back part of the original life and function of the frescoes. This approach allows the objects to regain and retain some of their voice by placing them in a context that mimics the original building in which the frescoes and icons were housed. While in form and size the construction of the Chapel replicates the building in Lysi, the opaque glass and concrete materials could cause The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum to be seen as a modernist museum building. The third layer is undoubtedly a large, white concrete cube in the most literal sense. If the frescoes and icons are works of art, and the glass structure that was built especially to house them can be seen as a display case, then the "outer shell" can be thought of as a modernist museum building. The walls inside the "outer

shell" may not be stark white like the white cube that is discussed in the following section, but the function still serves to separate the art inside from the world outside does as a modernist museum space.

O'Dougherty's (1999) *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* offers an exploration of the modernist museum space. O'Dougherty characterizes the space as being one that has stark white walls with no windows, thereby keeping the outside world separated from the art. In this type of museum space "the gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is "art." The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself" (O'Dougherty, 1999, p. 14). O'Dougherty also describes the ideological influences of the white cube and of the modernist museum space and how that ideology coincides with art that was produced at the time of the emergence of the modernist museum. For example, the objects become art when they are situated in context, such as an art gallery. O'Dougherty (1999) states that "ideas are more interesting than art" in this space called the white cube (p. 14).

Grunenberg's (1999) "The Modern Art Museum" builds upon O'Dougherty's description of the white cube that has taken over the modern museum space. The author brings up the point that artists of the 20th century created works that were meant to be displayed in the modern space of the white cube, but this leaves the reader wondering about artworks that were produced much earlier than the modern era, but are displayed in such spaces. By displaying objects from earlier time periods in a modern museum space, the original intentions of those artworks are clouded or changed. The author also states that abstract art is completely at home in the modernist museum space, in fact the two have a "symbiotic relationship," meaning that each provides a vital service for the other (Grunenberg, 1999, p. 26). Grunenberg (1999) agrees with others, like O'Dougherty, in

that “modern art museums are anything but neutral spaces” (p. 48) and therefore we must expect that the objects within them are altered in their meanings.

Interestingly, Grunenberg (1999) expresses the notion that even the modernist white cube is a constructed environment “that is associated with the canonization of specific types of art” (p. 48). This line of thinking suggests that even the white cube is a simulacrum, or a simulated place meant to represent reality, and in some cases one that accurately contextualizes the art work in time and space. For artists working in the modernist tradition the white cube is the perfect environment that has been constructed for their art work. The modernist museum space was designed, drawing upon similar ideals that artists of the 20th century used to create their artwork. To display artwork that was created before the modern era, a more careful and deliberate approach to the space should be considered by the curators and other museum staff. It is true that in the end all museum spaces can be considered a simulacrum; they are all simulated spaces where artwork is taken and put on display. The key is for museum staff to decide in what context to display the objects in their collections in order to give the visitors the best possible chance to make connections and thereby opening up the possibilities for a more expanded sense of learning.

CONCLUSION

For the BFCM, the choices made in the display of the frescoes have been specifically planned and are deliberate. These choices have occurred so the objects can be contextualized in a way that enables them to reveal their original function as religious objects as well as be seen in the context of a museum. This museum space occupies the realm of the sacred as a church and the secular as a museum; therefore, it also resides betwixt and between the literal and the liminal. This virtual, liminal space is where visitors are more likely to have meaningful experiences in the BFCM. By having these

meaningful experiences the visitors are more likely to make connections to their own lives through the works of art.

Chapter 3: Methodology

A Qualitative Study

To answer my main research question, "What types of responses are elicited by the Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum?" I knew that I wanted to utilize a qualitative research method because, according to Stake (2010), qualitative research is concerned with the experiences people have and the ways they understand those experiences. A qualitative research study has certain characteristics according to Stake (2010), the first being that it is interpretive, meaning that the researcher interprets the data. Second, the study is experiential, meaning that the reader has a vicarious experience elicited by reading the material. Third, a qualitative research study is situational, in that it is "holistic" and concerned with the full experience of the situation being studied (Stake, 2010, p. 15). Lastly, a qualitative research study is personal, because it is human centered. In my research study I aimed to discover the experiences people have in the BFCM, so these visitors are at the center of my study, making my study fit well the characteristics and qualities of qualitative research.

Phenomenology

To address my specific qualitative study I used the method of phenomenology. According to Lester (1999), in its purest form "phenomenology is concerned with the study of the experience from the perspective of the individual" and seeks to describe the phenomena, not explain it" (p. 1). In using phenomenology I brought to light the specific responses described by the participants in my study in order to identify the phenomena of experience in the space. To do this I had to first identify the responses visitors had in the space. Moustakas (1994) states that the "phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive description" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

Using a phenomenological research method enabled me to collect rich data that is full of description, which helped me to answer my secondary research questions: What do these responses reveal regarding learning within the space? and What is the significance of these experiences for museum education?

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

Lester (1999) acknowledges that it may be difficult for a researcher like myself to be completely removed from a study like this one because the researcher is an actor in the experience. My presence at The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum as a researcher asking visitors about their experience caused them to revisit their experience inside the space when they recounted their experiences later. Lester advises that the researcher be acknowledged as an "interested observer" or a "subjective actor." My role in this study is one of interested observer, in that I simply recorded what the visitors had to say via audio recording once the visitors had exited the Chapel. I also kept a journal with notes about each participant to help in the description of each individual in the study. I characterize myself as "interested" because I am truly invested in the outcome of this study, and I also wanted to make the participants feel comfortable to speak with me about their experiences. However, it was important to me that I stay an observer. Because of my own powerful experience at The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum, I tried very hard to not become an actor in this study by not sharing with the participants my own story about the space. It was also important that I remain open to the data the participants provided during analysis and interpretation, understanding that not everyone had an experience in the BFCM like mine.

FORGING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MENIL FAMILY

To gain permission to research the visitors' experience at the Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum in Houston Texas, I spoke directly with Susan de Menil over the phone. When I talked with Ms. de Menil I spoke with her about my experience in the space and how interested I was in learning more about how other people reacted to it and what significance those experiences had to museum education. Ms. de Menil was pleased to have me researching the Chapel because in a short time the frescoes will be headed back to Cyprus, and the chance for conducting research in this space will be gone. Ms. de Menil put me in touch with two curators at the site who wrote a letter granting me permission to conduct research at the location (Appendix A).

FINDING THE PARTICIPANTS FOR MY STUDY

To gather the data needed for my research study I required approximately ten to twelve participants. I selected this number because the data set created by ten to twelve people's experiences would be small enough to be manageable for a master's thesis research project. Yet, ten to twelve interviews would also create a data set large enough to possibly see replication in responses, which would indicate that multiple people had similar responses to the space. Also, when conducting a phenomenological research study it is important to have multiple participants, because it is easier to make inferences. However, Lester (1999) cautions that "phenomenological research can be robust in indicating the presence of factors and their effects in individual cases, but must be tentative in suggesting their extent in relation to the population from which the participants or cases were drawn" (Lester, 1999, p. 1). In this way it is important to focus on describing the experience of participants only, and not trying to explain these experiences with too much finality.

I recruited these participants by waiting in a room outside the Chapel space for visitors to exit. When they left the space I asked them if they would like to participate in a research study I was conducting as part of my master's thesis at The University of Texas at Austin. I explained that I only needed a few moments of their time and that I would like to find out about their experiences inside the Chapel. I gave them an informed consent form to sign (Appendix B) and began the data gathering process. I secured eleven participants for my research study. This group was made up of adult visitors, five men and six women of varying ages.

DATA GATHERING TOOLS

In qualitative research studies Stake (2010) states that observation and interview are the most common tools used by researchers. To collect data for this research study I utilized a semi-structured interview as my tool. Semi-structured interviews were the right choice for my study because I was attempting to obtain "unique information or interpretation held by [the] person interviewed" (Stake, 2010, p. 95). A semi-structured interview is one that the researcher creates before the interview and is comprised of open-ended and probing questions and the researcher should keep the interview format conversational. The researcher is not required to follow the structure of the interview, if the researcher feels it necessary to deviate from the interview questions. I created a list of questions I intended to ask (Appendix C), but I was not boxed in by these questions; it was important that the format of the interview could be flexible to allow the visitors to share their stories with me.

My main goal was to enable the visitors to tell me their stories about the experience they had inside the space in their own words. All of the interviews I conducted were audio recorded and later transcribed. After each interview I had with a visitor I took down notes and observations in a journal, which I used to help me

remember distinguishing characteristics about each participant that assisted me in telling their stories, which appear in Chapter 4.

A Narrative Approach to Data Analysis

To investigate a phenomenon like human experience, as I am doing in this research study, requires a methodology that works well as a frame but that also allows room for other methodologies as well. In the case of this research study I use phenomenology in addition to narrative inquiry. Phenomenology calls for the description of phenomena, and by using narrative I am able to let the participants' stories give rich description of experiences inside the Chapel.

Reed and Speedy (2011) discuss the nuances of narrative inquiry as a research methodology in that it "speaks to the particularities rather than the generalities of people's lives" (p. 110). Teasing out a participant's narrative can be tricky and time is an issue that must be contended with; one must negotiate the actual time the researcher is in versus the time where in the story takes place, versus the time the teller may think they are in (Reed & Speedy, 2011). According to Webster and Martova (2007) stories, used by researchers in narrative inquiry, enable the research to delve into experiences to discover how people interpret their world. In this study I was drawn to complex human experiences inside the Chapel, but these human experiences are difficult to describe so narrative inquiry works well to address "the complexities and subtleties" when dealing with human experience. Narrative inquiry is comfortable for the participants in the study as it is one of the oldest forms of knowledge transmission (Webster &Martova, 2007). This was important to me because I wanted the visitors who participated in my study to share their stories with me. An advantage of using narrative inquiry is that it "illustrates the temporal notion of experience, recognizing that one's understanding of people and events changes" (Webster &Martova, 2007, p. 2). As I am most interested in

investigating the space in terms of human experience, and re-telling stories is a great way to accomplish this.

Webster and Martova (2007) caution that when using narrative inquiry the researcher is not reconstructing the facts of an event, instead the stories tell us how people perceived that event. In this way, narrative inquiry "does not strive to produce any conclusions of certainty, but aims for its findings to be 'well grounded' and 'supportable," it "does not claim to represent the 'truth,' but rather aims for 'verisimilitude'-- that the results have the appearance of truth or reality" (Webster &Martova, 2007, p. 4). This is why I chose to interview enough people so that the findings could be numerous and patterns and commonalities could be found among the data, giving the study verisimilitude. Some may question the validity of this research methodology, but to answer my research question I need a human-centered approach because I am investigating the experiences people have in a space. My method needs to be one that does not have to be sequential, or follow a plot, because when people tell stories they do not tend to do so in a liner way, but instead shift around from point to point. Lastly, my study requires that the data not be explanatory and that it can have open-ended conclusions because stories are constantly changing as they are told, remembered, and retold (Webster &Martova, 2007).

According to Clandinin, Huber, Steeves, and Li (2011), narrative inquiry is "more than telling or analyzing stories" (p. 33). They claim that when engaging in narrative inquiry the researcher must think with stories not about stories, because stories are living changing entities (Clandinin, Huber, Steeves, & Li, 2011). When you think *about* a story, you analyze it, asking questions of its validity or the reliability of the story teller. However, when you think *with* story you are weaving a complex narrative that can fully relate not just the facts, but also the experience. This type of knowing is always changing,

because people are always interacting with the world, so too a narrative is always forming and influenced by the world around it (Clandinin et al., 2011).

Narrative inquiry is unique in that it allows both the researcher and the participants "a narrative space for telling and retelling experiences they have lived, and are living" (Clandinin et al., 2011, p. 34). The authors argue that one cannot learn narrative inquiry from books; it begins with our own story and examination of the self (Clandinin et al., 2011). This examination must be done because the inquirer's job is complex; to respond to and retell the story takes personal growth and understanding (Clandinin et al., 2011). To create an interesting and compelling data analysis chapter, I have retold the visitors' stories in a way that enables them to come to life in a series of vignettes, which I then analyze using Clandinin et al. (2011) three dimensions of narrative inquiry space.

Clandinin et al. (2011) discuss a "three dimensional narrative inquiry space" that is comprised of the temporal, the social, and the place (p. 34). The temporal is concerned with the past, present, and future of human existence. The social deals with the inner and outer self (the personal and the social) as it relates to the world. The last dimension has to do with the concrete physical place the stories are about or told within. In the data analysis portion of this study, found in Chapter 4, I talk about the ways each of the stories the participants in my study told occupy these three dimensions of narrative inquiry.

CONCLUSION

Through the lens of phenomenology this research study has aimed to describe the experiences people have inside The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum. Using the principles of narrative inquiry each participant's story in their own voices serve to add individual character to the eleven different experiences I collected during this study. Using the three dimensions of narrative inquiry described by Clandinin et al. (2001) as a

means to organize and categorize the data enabled patterns and commonalities to emerge in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: The Story of My Research Study

On the thirtieth day of December, an unseasonably mild day for this time of year, I set out to Houston to investigate what kinds of responses are elicited in visitors other than me to the BFCM. I arrived when the museum opened at eleven o'clock in the morning, hoping to interview at least a third of the people I needed for my research study. I was concerned that because the BFCM is tucked away in what feels like the middle of a neighborhood that not many visitors came to see the Chapel, especially on a Friday. Luckily, I had nothing to worry about because on that last week in December when I chose to visit the BFCM I was told that a few hundred people had visited the Chapel every day that week. When I arrived I went into the Chapel to reacquaint myself with the space. I walked in and just sat for awhile, mentally preparing myself to put on my researcher hat and begin the investigative portion of my study. I spoke with the two people who worked at the desk in the atrium of the BFCM who said they would direct people, after they left the Chapel, to the room, where I would conduct my interviews, which was near the courtyard entrance. So there I waited, sitting on a bench against a stone wall and looking through a glass enclosure at the stunning courtyard, waiting to interview the first visitor who came my way.

I interviewed eleven people for this research study, five men and six women. I did not ask them their age, but based on my estimation all eleven people were adults between the ages of twenty and seventy. To begin, I asked each of them if they had visited the Chapel prior to this experience. Of the eleven people I interviewed at the BFCM, ten of them had never been there, while one had visited on a previous occasion. I also observed that everyone who participated in my study was not at the Chapel alone. People came to the museum in pairs or groups of either family or friends. The last week in December

was a good time to conduct my research because many people do not have to work and are visiting family or friends, and while they are visiting they like to visit places such as museums.

DATA ANALYSIS: MEETING THE ACTORS

In my time at the BFCM I heard eleven people's stories about their experience inside the space. I spoke with thirteen adults on that day, but have only included eleven participants in my study because two people would not consent to audio recording. The eleven participants (five men and six women) in my study were adults of ranging ages, and diverse ethnic and social backgrounds. Of the eleven people I spoke with only one had visited the museum previously. Additionally all of the participants came to the Chapel with friends or family.

I heard eleven stories on that day. These included stories such as Dale's[2], an older gentleman with a bushy white mustache and a cane, who sat with me on a bench outside of the Chapel and shared his story with me:

> I had never been to this museum before, and I spent a good fifteen minutes in this one. As I went inside it I noticed that the mood of this museum space is quiet to me. The first thing I noticed was the window in the back wall. So I looked at that and thought that maybe I should look at the whole thing from that perspective, but then I decided that was not the best way to see the artwork. I decided to walk up first toward the altar and looked at the piece there and then the two icons on either side of the altar. Then I looked up and saw the fresco on the ceiling. I knew I had to sit down because I can't look up and keep my balance. So I sat down and looked up and I wasn't very satisfied so I decided to lie down on the bench and I basically looked up and took it as a whole. I was looking at the details. I realized I couldn't get up, so my wife had to pull me up. I had to experiment with my glasses, so I could see the whole thing. I read the description of the center piece. It was obvious it was a band of angels and John the Baptist and The Virgin Mary. I still haven't figured out that here seems to be two thrones instead of one.
>
> While I was in there I began to think about how I've been in small churches like this before, outside Yekaterinberg, in Siberia, when they exhumed

[2] Names have been changed to protect the identity of the study participants.

> the family that was exterminated, The Romanovs. After the revolution, when they dug them up and moved them, they first of all canonized every one of them and then they built an orthodox church to each one of them. The one for the little kid is a real little one. These were late 20th century churches, but they were built in the Greek Orthodox Style. They are in a birch forest and they were built out of birch. They are remarkable.
>
> The other thing I thought about was, I have a man who works with me who is also a good friend, who is Greek and Greek Orthodox and I've been on business trips with him where we have actually toured Greek Orthodox Church sites. So one of the things I thought about was him, and one of the things I always remember about him was the icons, and for him the icons are sort of a different thing. You know they kiss icons, and touch them. So I couldn't help but think of him.
>
> While we were inside the Chapel, my wife and I had a conversation about who the angels were in the ceiling fresco. She was trying to figure out which angel was Michael and which one was Gabriel.
>
> As we were leaving the museum I was pleased, and also admiring of the architecture and the way of presenting it, and then also admiring that it's all going back to Cyprus.

Some of the stories, like Dale's, were fully developed with rich detail, while others were short and directly answered my questions. Bill, who wore a tailored tan blazer, was less moved to storytelling as he exited the Chapel:

> I have never been here before today and I feel like I spent five minutes inside. When I walked in I noticed the sign that said "stop and let your eyes adjust to the level of the light," so that made me stop and I guess I calmed down before I really went inside. Then I went directly to the dome and looked straight up and then I looked around at the various figures around the main image to see if I could recognize any significance or tie back to biblical figures that I'm familiar with. While we were inside the space my wife and I talked about the glass enclosure, which I thought was very well done because I didn't think about it until my wife mentioned it. The glass is transparent so that it just helps present the art. The structure didn't obstruct it, nor was it obtrusive. As I left the Chapel, honestly, I was just hungry. I didn't feel any lasting feelings as I was leaving.

Other stories about experiences inside the Chapel were like Bobby's, a transgendered man, who revealed memories about deep personal histories with religious spaces and the people associated with them:

> This was my first time visiting this museum and I'd say I spent two or three minutes inside the chapel itself. To me the mood of the overall Chapel was very calming, but because it's dark and hard to see exactly what was inside, I was slow to go into the space. Coming from my own background and being the type of person I am, I have had some not so pleasant experiences with church-types. I was unsure if I was allowed in a place like this, even though it is a museum. I just felt like I needed to look at it from the back, so I stayed out where the benches were for awhile. I felt like I needed to have that moment, then I could move up and gawk at the rest. While inside the chapel my friend and I didn't talk to each other, we just took it all in.

After I interviewed all the participants for my study I listened to the audio recordings many times and began to transcribe the interviews. After each interview was transcribed, I analyzed the data by looking for the three dimensions of narrative inquiry as discussed by Clandinin, Huber, Steeves, and Li (2011). The first dimension I looked at was the place; I define this as when the participants are discussing the actual space they are physically in. The next is the social dimension, which I define as occurring when the participants are interacting with other visitors in the space or reflecting on the self. The third dimension is the temporal, which I define as when the participant is discussing the past, or present. In the following three sections I discuss how participants in this research study shared stories that occupy one or more of the previously mentioned three dimensions of narrative inquiry.

PLACE: THE FIRST DIMENSION OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The first dimension of narrative inquiry I looked at when analyzing the stories I collected at the BFCM was the dimension of place, which for my data analysis means the concrete physical place the stories are about. All eleven stories occupy this dimension of narrative, for every person talked about some physical aspect of the building or the artwork inside it. Peggy, a young woman who came to the Chapel with friends told me about how she had expectations of the space based on her experiences at other museums:

> When I went inside I noticed that it was definitely different than other museums, because those are white and really bright and this one was really dark. When I left I felt a little disappointment. I thought it was going to be bigger, and have more things inside to look at. Stepping out of the darkness was like coming back to the real world.

The other museums Peggy talks about here are what would be considered a white cube. As discussed in Chapter 2 a white cube is a museum space with stark white walls and no windows, serving the purpose of keeping the art separated from the outside world (Grunenberg, 1999; O'Dougherty, 1999;). Peggy was struck by how different this museum space was compared to the others she had visited before.

For some people, like LuAnn, the Chapel was the main character in their story:

> I have never been here before and I think I spent five minutes in there. When I went in I first noticed the sign. It makes you kind of hesitate and makes you aware that you are going into a sacred space. I looked up at the dome and just looked around. I tried to take in the whole space at once. I was very interested in the architecture of the Chapel as much as I was the frescoes. I didn't talk to anybody while I was in there, but on the way out we talked about the glass that the chapel was made from. As I'm talking I'm realizing that I like going into spaces like that. I was just very impressed with the serene setting. Afterwards we walked out into the courtyard to get a better sense of the building as a whole because we didn't see much of it as we were walking up the sidewalk.

LuAnn notes that she was just as interested in the architecture of the Chapel as she was in the art objects inside the space. For her it was even important to investigate the outside concrete structure to form a better understanding of the entire setting of the BFCM. Other visitors, like Joseph, were mainly interested in the art objects like the frescoes and the icons:

> I have never been to The Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum before today so I spent about ten minutes inside. I was curious to see what was in there when I first walked in. My time inside was spent mostly looking at the big round piece on the ceiling. I did go to the front because I was curious about the icons. They seemed to be well preserved, like maybe one of them could be new. Mostly though, I was interested in the overhead bits.

For visitors like Joseph, the objects inside the space were the most intriguing, and the Chapel that was built to surround it did not play a role in their story. For Peggy, LuAnn, and Joseph the dimension of place in their narrative is occurring in the present, it is the setting where in their stories take place.

Place is necessary for all stories, it helps to situate the action in space and time, giving it a concrete location. For my analysis of this dimension of narrative inquiry, place is denoted in a participant's story anytime they discuss the physical structure of the BFCM or the objects inside it. All eleven participants used the Chapel, frescoes, or icons as a starting point for their individual stories. Peggy, LuAnn, and Joseph focused on the dimension of place in their stories more than the other participants in the study, which made their stories ideal for illustrating the first dimension of narrative inquiry.

SOCIAL: THE SECOND DIMENSION OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The second dimension of narrative inquiry that I used to analyze the stories I gathered at the BFCM is the social dimension. The social dimension, according to Clandinin et al. (2011), deals with the inner and outer self and how those selves relate to the world. For this section of my data analysis one way I situate participants' stories in the social dimension is when people talk about their interactions with others while inside the BFCM. These types of interactions have to do with the outer self. As Clandinin et al. (2011) mention, the social dimension is also concerned with the inner self. For the purposes of this research study, this aspect of the social dimension, having to do with the inner self is noted when a participant's experience inside the space is a reflection, an internal examination of the self, or a questioning of their identity.

All eleven participants in my study came to the museum with a least one other person, making the museum a place of potential social interaction because everyone I spoke with had someone there they knew personally with whom to talk. In the course of

my interviews with the participants in my study I asked each one if they had any conversations inside the BFCM. Of the eleven people I talked to, five of them had no conversations in the space, while the other six people did. Of the five people who had no conversations while inside the Chapel some, like Hank, explain that,

> Even though I was here with friends, we didn't talk to each other inside the Chapel. For some reason everyone just keeps quiet, people just don't want to talk in there.

Hank did not give a reason why he and his friends did not talk to one another inside the Chapel, but Minh, who also had no conversations while inside the Chapel, gives an explanation about why that occurred:

> I noticed that as I crossed the threshold into the museum the mood definitely changed for me. I felt a more serious tone as the light changed, I felt like I was going to see something incredible, so I'd better be quiet, and not disturb the mood of it or the aura of the place. I didn't talk at all while I was in there, it's just so quiet. I definitely felt like I wasn't supposed to have a conversation in there. It's like a library.

For Minh, the mood of the place was serious, set by the low lighting that made her feel uncomfortable to speak. She related the aura, or feeling of the space, to a library where there is an expectation of quiet. Similarly, Peggy did not have any conversations in the Chapel either.

> I didn't speak to anyone while I was inside, I just sat and started reading the brochure, and looking at the pictures.

Although Hank, Minh, and Peggy did not speak with their friends and family while in the Chapel, other participants had rich conversations while looking at the frescoes and icons. Nancy for example, says that,

> While we were in the Museum I talked with my husband, we were trying to figure out who the different angels were.

While Nancy and her husband were in the Chapel they spent some time discussing the figures and trying to use what they know from prior knowledge to name the angels depicted on the dome. Another person who told me a lot about her experience inside the Chapel and the conversations she had was Connie, who had come to the BFCM with a large number of extended family members. Connie states that,

> My family and I talked a lot while we were inside. We talked a little bit about how amazing it was that the Menils brought all this art back together and did it in a way that recognized that it was temporary and that it would be going back. I talked a little bit with the kids about how old the frescoes were; it was hard for them to understand how many hundreds of years had gone by since they were created.

Connie and her family used the opportunity of a day at the museum to educate the children in the family about the history of the Chapel and the frescoes. While Nancy and Connie talked about the figures and the frescoes with their families some people, like Bill, focused on the architecture of the space in their conversations. Bill said that,

> While we were inside the space my wife and I talked about the glass enclosure, which I thought was very well done because I didn't think about it until my wife mentioned it. The glass is transparent so that it just helps present the art. The structure didn't obstruct it, nor was it obtrusive.

Bill and his wife were most impressed by the glass structure that makes up the walls of the Chapel, so their conversations centered on that while they were inside the space. Here, two dimensions of narrative inquiry overlap. The dimension of place, or the physicality of the space, evoked the social dimension, or the conversation that Bill and his wife shared inside the BFCM.

Less than 40% of the participants in my study (four people) felt comfortable to speak inside the BFCM and shared a moment of awe, reflection, or speculation with the people accompanying them on that day. The other seven people who did not have conversations in the space experienced the BFCM differently. These seven people reacted

to the space in a way that is in line with what the environment of the Chapel demands--silence. The majority of the people in this study reacted to the space in just the way that Dominique de Menil had intended, with a quiet tone that one would take on inside a sacred space.

Another aspect to the social dimension is behavior. Among the people in my study who did not have conversations in the Chapel (Hank, Bobby, Minh, Peggy, LuAnn, DeDe, and Joseph) some like Hank and Minh talked a little about why they did not have conversations inside. Because all the other people inside the BFCM were quiet while he was there, Hank felt social pressure and was also quiet. In this case Hank was taking his behavioral queues from the other visitors that were already inside the space when he arrived. Minh also looked to the other people in the space to negotiate her own behavior. She says that,

> I walked in and everyone was sitting, so I thought someone was going to present something to us, so I just sat in the back and waited. Then after a few moments I noticed people getting up and looking around so I got the courage to move up to get closer.

From the moment Minh walked into the Chapel she looked around and used the other visitors' behavior as a template for her own. She saw everyone sitting on the benches, so she copied them. Then, only when she saw the other visitors get up and look at the frescoes and icons, did she follow their actions. Minh modeled her behavior in the space after the other visitors that were already there when she arrived. Had they been engaged in conversations, Minh might have done the same and engaged in a conversation of her own with the friend she was with at the museum that day.

Museums, as a place in my museum going experience, are social spaces. When I visit a museum it is almost always with friends or family. By its nature storytelling is also a social act involving more than one person. At the BFCM the social nature of a museum

and the social act of storytelling and conversation did not occur for all of the participants in my study while they were inside the Chapel.

The fact cannot be ignored that seven of the eleven participants in my research study did not speak with their companions while inside the BFCM. The way this space was created with the intentions of creating a museum that walks the line between the sacred and the secular, demands quiet. The participants in this study who let the quiet calm space wash over them and took advantage of the serenity of the space let the dual nature of the BFCM work for them. They saw the art objects, but they also observed the sacred tone of the space, thereby richly experiencing the liminality of this museum that is both sacred and secular.

Nancy, Connie, and Bill's stories illustrate the outer self in the social dimension of narrative inquiry in that they all discuss their interactions with other people while in the BFCM. Hank, Minh, and Peggy's stories illustrate in inner self in the social dimension, as they did not have conversations inside the space but they were reflecting on the space and objects with themselves. Bobby is another participant whose story is situated in the social dimension via the inner self. However, Bobby's story is different because he/she shared some of his/her inner reflections about his/her own identity that was evoked by the space. Bobby was a transgendered individual, in that he/she was wearing a mixed gender outfit, complete with long silky hair, a full beard, and long artificial nails painted a splendid shade of pink. When asked to describe his/her experience inside the space he/she responded with the following,

> It's dark and hard to see exactly what was inside so I was slow to go into the space. Coming from my own background of a religious upbringing and being the type of person I am, I have had some not so pleasant experiences with church-types. I was unsure if I was allowed in a place like this, even though it is a museum. I just felt like I needed to look at it from the back, so I stayed out where

> the benches were for awhile. I felt like I needed to have that moment to make sure it was OK for me to be there, and then I could move up and gawk at the artwork.

As Bobby walked inside the BFCM he/she was in a state of reflection and examination of him/herself, which brought up questions of both religious and sexual identity. Bobby shared this information with me, giving me an insight into what he/she was examining within him/herself as he/she experienced the BFCM. This inner examination that is categorized as the social dimension of narrative inquiry was evoked by the temporal dimension that is discussed in the following section.

TEMPORAL: THE THIRD DIMENSION OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The final dimension of narrative as discussed by Clandinin et al. (2011) is the temporal. The temporal dimension is concerned with the past, present, and future of human existence. A museum is a temporal space because the art objects on display tell a story from the past, yet the objects exist in the present. The nature of narrative is also temporal because storytelling generally is concerned with the past. For this section of data analysis I looked at the memories people related to me in their stories as the temporal because memories have to do with the past. I also considered that when a participant in my study was talking about the BFCM and their reactions to the space, this was the temporal because they were talking about the present. The analysis of my data did not have any references to the future because I was asking the participants to tell me their stories about the experiences they had in the Chapel, but some alluded to the future when speaking about how they were appreciative of the space.

Five of the eleven participants in my study related a memory from their past to me in the stories they told on the day I visited the BFCM. Hank's story was inspired by the dome:

> I'm kind of big on domes. I spent a lot of time at St. Peter's, which is my favorite dome. That's everyone's favorite dome. Have you ever read *Brunelleschi's*

> *Dome*? About the building of one of the great domes in Italy. It's one of the first that was free standing. It just seems like a smaller version of that, just the concept of that and the construction angles, great. I guess I appreciate it more for the conservation angle and especially the work they've done on the dome with really restoring that. I mean it is beautiful work.

When Hank visited the Chapel he was reminded of his time in Italy and visiting St. Peter's. Hank's time inside the Chapel in Houston made him remember other domed structures he had visited or read about and relate that prior knowledge to this space. Hank's story also references history, specifically art history and the aspect of the passage of time in a historical way. Dale, who we met at the beginning of this chapter, tells a story of his experience with a similar space in Siberia.

> While I was in there I began to think about how I've been in small churches like this before, outside Yekaterinberg, in Siberia, when they exhumed the family that was exterminated, The Romanovs. After the revolution, when they dug them up and moved them, they first of all canonized every one of them and then they built an orthodox church to each one of them. The one for the little kid is a real little one. These were late 20th century churches, but they were built in the Greek Orthodox Style, they are in a birch forest and they were built out of birch. They are remarkable.

Dale's memory was triggered by the size of the Chapel and he was transported to a different time and place when he had visited chapels similar in scale. Like Hank, Dale was reminded of a place he knew that had significance in history, specifically The Romanovs and their execution. Dale was also reminded of a man he knew, saying that,

> I have a man who works with me who is also a good friend, who is Greek and Greek Orthodox and I've been on business trips with him where we have actually toured Greek Orthodox Church sites. So one of the things I thought about was him. One of the things I always remember about him was what the icons mean for him. For him the icons are sort of a different thing, you know he kisses icons, and touches them. So I couldn't help but think of him.

In this part of Dale's story he was remembering a friend and the experiences that have shared together in other parts of the world. Seeing the Byzantine icons in a chapel/museum context made Dale think of his friend and what icons mean to him

because of his religious background. Dale's story is an example of how narrative can occupy multiple dimensions simultaneously. While his story occupies the temporal because it is situated in the past, it is also about the interactions he had with a friend, which places the story in the social dimension as well. The fact that this story takes place in the other church sites Dale visited with his friend, makes this story also occupy the dimension of place. In next section I discuss how all the stories I gathered in the course of my research study occupy two or more dimensions of narrative inquiry at the same time.

SPACE, SOCIAL, AND TEMPORAL: THE THREE DIMENSIONS COME TOGETHER

After analyzing all eleven stories I gathered at the BFCM, I realized that every participant's story was situated in all three dimensions of narrative inquiry. First, all eleven participants occupied the dimension of place. Each participant talked about the physical space of the Chapel, whether they were talking about the frescoes, the icons, the dome, or the glass structure. Second, all eleven stories told of either interactions with others (having to do with the outer self) or personal reflections (having to do with the inner self) that illustrated the social dimension. Some people had conversations in the space, like Dale, Nancy, Connie, and Bill. Others followed the example of concurrent visitors in the space, such as Minh. Bobby had an experience that caused him/her to examine questions of his/her own identity and how those questions were evoked by the space. All the participants engaged in the social dimension of narrative inquiry when they agreed to have a conversation with me about their experiences inside the Chapel. Third, every story that I have included in my study occupies the temporal dimension. Some people, like Hank, Bobby, and Dale shared memories from their past that the Chapel brought to their mind.

In some instances two dimensions overlap in the stories that I have retold in my research study. For example, when Minh talked about the change of the lighting when she

entered the space and how that made her notice a more serious tone, her story exemplifies both the place and the temporal dimension of narrative inquiry. Or when Nancy was recounting her experience inside the space, she talks about how she saw someone lying down on the bench to get a better look at the fresco on the ceiling. She thought this was a great idea and decided to do the same thing. In this instance, Nancy's story is situated in the social dimension because she is explaining how her outer self was relating to the world by mimicking other people's behavior, and it also occupies the temporal dimension because she is describing her experience in the present time.

Stories like Dale's occupy all three dimensions at the same time. He talks first about how the BFCM evoked the memory of similar churches he had seen before, a story which is situated in the dimension of place. This leads him to a discussion of historical events related to Russian history, which places his narrative in the temporal dimension. Finally, the BFCM reminds him of a friend and the times they have shared in other similar spaces throughout the world. Especially this last part of Dale's story sits in all three dimensions of narrative inquiry. The BFCM evokes the memory (temporal) of other churches around the world (place) that he shared with a friend (social).

Bobby's story is another example that strongly occupies all three dimensions. He/she begins by describing the BFCM and setting the scene, which puts his narrative in the dimension of place. Then he/she talks about the memory of his/her childhood and past experiences with people associated with churches, situating the narrative in the temporal. Bobby then discusses the internal struggle he/she faces as he/she walks through the Chapel, questioning his/her identity and how he/she can interact with this space. This inner struggle that Bobby described places the narrative in the social dimension. Like Dale, Bobby's narrative is also in all three dimensions simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

Each of the eleven participants' stories occupies all three dimensions of narrative inquiry at the same time. The same is true for museums. All at once the museum is situated between the dimensions of place, social, and temporal. The museum space is in the dimension of place because it is a physical place, which holds physical objects. The museum space also is in the social dimension because it is a public place where there is the possibility for interaction with other people. The museum space is in the temporal dimension because it is an institution that houses objects from the past and the present of human existence. Where these dimensions intersect, both in narrative and in museums, is the liminal place where learning can occur.

Chapter 5

WHAT RESPONSES WERE ELICITED BY THE BYZANTINE FRESCO CHAPEL MUSEUM?

The first question I set out to answer when I began this thesis research project was: What responses are elicited by the BFCM in Houston, Texas? After visiting the Chapel and talking with visitors I found that people had a range of experiences inside the space. Some of the visitors I spoke with had positive experiences, using words such as "pleased," "admiring," "appreciative," "impressed," and "calming" to describe their feelings upon leaving the Chapel. A few visitors, however, had less positive experiences in the space, using words such as "disappointment" and "relief" when asked to describe their experience in the space. One visitor was indifferent stating that he was "hungry" after leaving the Chapel, causing me to wonder what effect, if any, the BFCM had on him.

I found that most visitors were responding to the architectural elements of the Chapel when speaking about their experiences with the space. When they spoke of a calming or quiet feeling, they were responding to the low lighting and the intimate feeling of the small glass chapel. However, that closeness evoked a feeling of hesitation in others, like Bobby who was unsure of the space, stating that he/she had to stay in the back of the Chapel for a while and adjust to the space before venturing up close to it. Some of the participants in this study, like Minh, commented on the way she behaved while in the space. As Minh walked in and saw the other visitors sitting on the benches she followed their example and also sat, expectantly waiting for something to happen. Minh stated that she followed the example set by other visitors because of the feeling of "seriousness" she felt in the Chapel that was created by the low lighting and intimacy of the space.

The BFCM elicited different responses from each of the participants in the study, and I found that none of them had a powerful experience like the one I had when I visited the Chapel for the first time. However, each person's story told of their own personal experience inside the space, which illustrated one, two, or three dimensions of narrative inquiry.

After gathering all the data from the eleven participants in this study, I analyzed that data by discussing how each visitor's story contained one or more of the three dimensions of narrative inquiry: physical (place), social, and temporal. I found that all the participants in my study had a story to tell about their visit to the chapel and that their stories occupied the dimensions of place, social, and temporal. What Chapter 4 illustrated is that the BFCM elicited story from all the participants in my study. Eleven stories were told to me on that December day about eleven separate journeys through the space with eleven different outcomes. Positive or negative, the responses to the Chapel are the result of individual perceptions of the space and the previous life experiences each person brought with them.

As mentioned above, commonalities were found in some reactions to the space. When the visitors were asked to describe their mood upon entering or exiting the space, most of the visitors described a calming or quiet feeling. Upon leaving the space, most visitors reported feeling pleased or appreciative of the Chapel. Aside from these general commonalities, the experiences of each participant in my research study were individual and personally specific to the person. This final chapter aims to answer what these responses reveal regarding learning within the space and what is significant about these experiences for the field of museum education.

WHAT DO THESE RESPONSES MEAN?

For my research study I chose a methodology that would serve my purpose of investigating the responses to the BFCM. In this research study I was concerned with the individual's experience of the space, for this reason I chose phenomenology. I knew that what I had experienced at the BFCM was a phenomenon that I wanted to research to see if other visitors reacted in the same way I did when I visited the space during my undergraduate experience at The University of Texas at Austin. Phenomenology as a research method also allowed for me to collect data that was rich in description, which would aid in my attempt to describe the phenomenon of human experiences at the BFCM.

As I discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the phenomenon of experiences I observed while at the BFCM varied from person to person and were as different as each person I spoke with. However, within these eleven experiences at the Chapel I was looking for a thread that tied them all together, and that turned out to be narrative. By using phenomenology as the lens for my research study the narrative as the way to analyze the data I was able to use the participants' stories to describe the phenomenon of experience at the BFCM.

The response that all visitors had at the research site was the production of a story, or a narrative, about their experience. As each visitor told me their story they would begin with the BFCM, but that space would evoke either memories of other places, times, or people in the participants' lives. These stories that the visitors told me served as a recordable version of the emotional connections the visitors were making with the BFCM. When Hank is reminded of Brunelleschi's dome and the time he spent in Italy, he is making an emotional connection to the BFCM with a place and time in his past that has personal significance.

Similarly, when Dale experienced the BFCM he was flooded with memories of his time in other small chapels in Siberia. Dale made a connection between a past experience and the experience with the BFCM he was having at that moment. Dale also connects the BFCM with a personal friend he has traveled with around the world and who he has shared the experiences of similar eastern European churches. By relating his experience with the BFCM to memories and emotions in his past, Dale is insuring that the BFCM will also live on in his memory after the physical experience is over.

The connections of the experience of the BFCM to events in the visitors' past are the most significant responses elicited by the BFCM. These connections that are illustrated by the visitors' stories tell us that museum spaces that can evoke story and memory are effective museum spaces and increase the potential for meaningful reflection and learning.

WHAT DO THESE RESPONSES REVEAL REGARDING LEARNING WITHIN THE SPACE?

At the BFCM, there is a potential for meaning making to occur. According to Falk and Dierking (2002), context plays a large part in the learning process. The visitors who were able to relate stories or memories to me, like Hank, Dale and Bobby, have made a personal connection to the space by connecting it to their past. By forging these mental connections they have made the Chapel into a memory that is connected to other memories, strengthening its presence in their consciousness. My presence as the researcher may also have had a lasting effect on the visitors; those who did not relate a story from their past may still have created a memory of the space because I asked them to recount their experience inside the BFCM. My involvement with some participants, like Hank, Minh, and Peggy, whose experiences in the Chapel focused on the inner self, gave them the opportunity to verbally reflect on the BFCM, which they had not done before.

What my data has shown is that the BFCM evokes memory and stories from the visitors, which can help them make meaning in the space. However, making meaning is not the same as learning in the traditional sense of memorizing facts and being tested on those facts later. Learning in a museum, particularly the BFCM, is a different kind of engagement that may be evocative instead of informative. In this sense I mean that the BFCM is meant to evoke a response rather than provide information, which would be a more traditional way of learning. One way to measure the effectiveness of a museum space on learning is to use the criteria set up by Falk and Dierking (2002) and Csiksezentmihalyi and Hermanson (1995).

Overall the participants in my study reported positive feelings regarding their experiences with the BFCM. Falk and Dierking (2002) state that the key to learning is first a well planned out space and second an appropriate environment that relates to what is being learned. Dominique de Menil intended that the BFCM was a well thought-out space and she deliberately made the space both a museum and a church. Dominique de Menil made sure that the icons and frescoes were placed in a chapel that was constructed as reminiscent of the original in Lysi. She wanted the objects to be at home in a sacred environment, but one that was still a museum. Dominique de Menil also made sure that great care was taken to construct this space using modern materials. By expanding the space of the outer shell and creating a way for visitors to see the outside of the structure, this chapel serves as an art object itself acting as a reliquary, which houses the frescoes and the icons. Visitors are invited to walk around the glass structure and admire its formal qualities as an art object.

Another way to promote learning in a museum space is to help visitors create what Csiksezentmihalyi and Hermanson (1995) call a flow experience. For a flow experience to occur the following conditions must be met: (a) the visitor must be

intrinsically motivated, (b) the visitor's curiosity must be sparked, (c) the visitor must have clear goals and expectations, (d) there must be many levels of understanding, and (e) the visitor must be allowed to devote their full attention to the objects on display.

From the data I gathered at the BFCM the visitors I spoke with were intrinsically motivated. I think that is a characteristic of museum goers in general, they are choosing to go to the museum, instead of another leisure activity like going to a park or a movie theater, with no outside rewards. Also, the mysterious nature of the Chapel sparked much of curiosity from the visitors with whom I spoke. Only one of the eleven people I talked to had visited the space before, so the other ten participants were curious about the space when they entered it.

To create the conditions for a flow experience it is important for the visitors to have clear goals and expectations in the museum. This means that the staff must set up some type of goal for the visitor, even if that is something as simple as a path to take through the exhibition. This is not the case at the BFCM. There are information pamphlets in the lobby, but there is no clear indication of the expected outcomes or a route through the space. There are no large didactic panels here, such as those that can be found in other museum exhibitions that help visitors understand what they are looking at or give them a sense of how to go from one object to the next.

The lack of clear goals and expectations may have made it difficult for some people to make meaning in the space. Visitors like Bobby, who was confused about the nature of the space and not even sure if he/she was allowed to enter because the BFCM occupies both the sacred and the secular, did not know what was expected of him/her. Minh was also unsure of what was expected in the space. When she entered she looked around and mimicked what everyone else was doing, fearing that she would misbehave. Instead of enjoying the Chapel, she sat and waited for something to happen because the

other visitors were sitting. Then when they started to get up and look around, she did so as well. However, this was not true of all of the visitors I spoke with. Hank and Dale were inspired by the space; they both moved about the Chapel freely and shared with me experiences from their past that were elicited by the Chapel. Connie had long conversations with her family inside the space. She took the opportunity to use the Chapel as a place to learn about history and art. While a lack of clear expectations may seem to limit more traditional forms of learning, i.e., the informative kind, even the visitors who were unsure of what do in the BFCM had stories that were evoked by the space and created meaning through the connections they made to their own lives.

Another criterion that must be met for a flow experience to occur is that a museum must meet many levels of understanding because it is important to speak to the different visitors who come to the space. For a museum space to do this successfully it will have information for the art history enthusiast as well as the novice. The BFCM has little information, which is in the lobby only. Similarly to the previous discussion of having clear goals and expectations, this criterion is mainly needed for the informative type of learning, not the evocative type that happens at the BFCM.

The last element that must be met to create a flow experience is a distraction-free environment. The BFCM does this very well. There is a distinct change in lighting as you enter that signals to the visitor the environment is changing. This also caused many people to speak in hushed tones, which allows for the rest of the visitors to become immersed in the objects if they so wish.

The BFCM meets three of the five criteria set out by Csiksezentmihalyi and Hermanson (1995) to create a flow experience. These are intrinsic motivation, visitor curiosity, and lack of outside distractions. The data shows that all the visitors in this study had evocative experiences in the BFCM, and they all produced a narrative that

corresponded to those experiences. For the purposes of this study all eleven participants engaged in an evocative learning experience, rather than an informative one.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE EXPERIENCES FOR MUSEUM EDUCATION?

With regards to museum education, the experiences elicited by the BFCM show that spaces that do not focus on the informative type of learning need to create evocative experiences. If museum spaces like the BFCM can do this successfully, they are more than likely to live in people's memories longer and create a learning experience. Morales (2007) states that museum spaces like period rooms, or in the case of this research study the BFCM, are themselves a form of narrative and are therefore more concerned with meaning making rather than the transmission of art historical information. Morales argues that objects need to connect to the everyday lives of people so that a real connection can be made between the visitor and the objects. Hank connected the space to his travels in Italy; Dale connected the space to his travels in Siberia and a long time friend. Bobby connected the BFCM to other sacred spaces he/she had been in before, and Connie made historical connections in the conversation she had with her family while inside the Chapel.

In the case of the BFCM, great care was taken to show that the objects which are displayed in this space occupy a place in the 13th century, when they were created, as well as a place in our time as they are situated in a chapel that is constructed from modern materials. The BFCM aids in the meaning making process because it helps contextualize the art objects and gives the visitors a sense of what it would have been like to view these in their original context. One of the most powerful responses participants in this study had was to the large fresco on the ceiling in the middle of the space. Visitors I interviewed remarked how the very close proximity to the huge Christ figure made them feel a connection to the piece and the space. Nancy commented that despite the fact that

she was not a Christian, being in such proximity to the Christ figure made her feel a connection to Him. By recreating the architectural elements of the space, the Menils ensured that the visitor is able to experience these frescoes in a location as they were meant to be when they were created.

The BFCM is a constructed space, in that it is a museum space intentionally created with a specific purpose in mind. That purpose, as laid out by Dominique de Menil, was to create a space that straddled the line between the sacred and the secular. Because it is betwixt and between these two realms the BFCM occupies the liminal zone, allowing for the possibility of meaning making to occur. DeLosso (2010) places the liminal between the physical and the cognitive, and calls it the phenomenon of thought. For the purposes of this study, the physical structure of the space was created to promote intentional reflection inside oneself about the space, and about ones' own life experience. In this study Bobby's experience clearly illustrates this point. He/she came to the BFCM expecting another museum space filled with artwork, but was instead confronted with questions of his own identity. The quiet atmosphere and contemplative nature of the BFCM initiated Bobby to reflect upon and ponder these questions within him/her, bridging the gap between the sacred and the secular.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

I started this project because I was so taken in by the space. It encroached on my brain, begging to be researched. As I gathered preliminary research on the BFCM, I found out that there was very little in the way of visitor study, and that my research project came at time when the frescoes were about to go back to Lysi. I expected that at least some of the people I interviewed at the BFCM would have had similar experiences to mine. However, I did not find anyone who had such a powerful reaction to the space as I did. Because the type of experience I had was not present in the participants in my study

does not make it less valuable, or indicate that I am the only person who had a very powerful experience in this space. It simply indicates that personal experience is unique and varies from one individual to the next. Also, my study was limited by the small number of participants included. Had more people been interviewed it is possible that other experiences like mine may have been observed at the BFCM.

If this had been a longer research study, perhaps over the course of six months, I could have interviewed more people. This way the data may have shown additional varied experiences within the BFCM. To help further this research I believe that a more detailed visitor study should be conducted, one that would focus on the lone looker and how they respond to the space. A study that would allow the researcher to observe the visitor in the BFCM, and then ask them questions would add valuable data to this study. This would give the researcher insight into how long the visitor was in the space versus how long they felt like they were in the space. The researcher's observations of the visitors would also add another layer to the study, instead of just gathering the visitor responses to questions asked by the researcher.

Alas, this study could be expanded to include speaking with the participants a month after they had visited the space to see what, if any, are the extended effects of the BFCM on visitors. Dufresne-Tasse and Lefebvre (1994) state that post-visit interviews provide insight into the visitor's own feelings about the benefits of their museum visit. I would be interested to see if there are people like myself who visit the space and then keep thinking about the experience long after they have left the site. Interviewing the participants a month after they had visited the Chapel would give insight into the long-term learning that may occur inside the museum space.

Benefits to Art Education

I chose this site for my research study because I am interested in museum spaces and how they affect visitor experiences. The BFCM was an interesting site to me because of the care that was taken to build a space for the frescoes that replicated the chapel they call home in Lysi. I was interested in investigating the connections between space and learning in the museum that would inform my own practice as an art educator as well as add knowledge to the field.

As museum professionals I believe that we can get caught up in the objects on display and forget about the environment in which they are displayed. I believe this research study provides a way that we can look at the physical spaces involved in museum display and discover meaningful ways to create educational programs that use the museum space as a catalyst to increase opportunities for visitors to make meaning inside the museum space.

Concluding Remarks

This study has shown that visitors never come to the museum as a clean slate. They walk in with a myriad of life experiences that influence how they interpret the space and the art within it. At the BFCM, some people entered with expectations that the museum did not live up to, while others were pleased with what the Menils had done to save the fragmented frescoes. Some visitors came to the Chapel with negative experiences with churches in their past and were reluctant to open themselves up to the experience and enjoy the space for purely aesthetic purposes.

From interviews with the participants in my study, it is clear that some people would like to have clear expectations when they visit the museum. Visitors who are like Minh might find it difficult to negotiate the "proper" behavior as visitors when they are unsure of what to do. That feeling of uneasiness makes the visit difficult to enjoy because

the visitors are constantly looking for the "right" answer to what they should be doing or looking at. At the end of Minh's interview I asked her to describe her mood as she left the BFCM. She responded that she was glad she did not do anything she "wasn't supposed to." As a visitor at a museum it is counterproductive to be second guessing yourself with thoughts of "Am I doing this right?" or "What should I be looking at?"

As museum educators we should strive to meet the visitors where they are, and part of that recognition is understanding the need to help visitors overcome preconceived notions about the museum as an institution. One way to do this is to encourage conversation and dialogue in museum spaces, which can increase the visitors' comfort level and enable them to be more open to the experience. Conversation also motivates visitors to participate in the social aspect of visiting the museum, which will increase their likelihood to form positive memories about the space. At the beginning of this study I thought that social interactions involving the outer self, mainly having conversations, were the most important parts of a positive museum experience. I thought this because I believed that sharing an experience made it last.

As I was writing this chapter I had the opportunity to travel to Michigan for a job interview, and stayed in the nicest hotel I have ever been to. As I was sitting in my room, in the fuzzy hotel bathrobe eating the chocolates left on the pillows I reflected on the experience of being in this hotel. I had traveled to Michigan alone and without anyone with whom to share my experience. I felt that the experience of this luxurious space was somehow lessened because I had no one to talk about the experience and to share in the excitement of being in such a lavish hotel room. As I am writing these final I find myself reflecting on my experience inside the BFCM and I realize that the experience I had there was an individual one. I was surrounded by classmates when I visited the space, but we

did not discuss our emotional reactions while inside, yet my experience was so powerful that I chose to conduct a research study focusing on this site.

In Chapter 4 I discussed the ways the participants' outer selves entered into the social dimension of narrative inquiry through their interactions with other people in the space. I also noted how the social dimension encompassed the inner self, and that the inner reflections participants had were also part of the social dimension of the experience. These individual, inner experiences are the most significant at the BFCM. Unlike my stay at the luxury hotel in Michigan, which I felt needed the corroboration of another person to validate my experience; the experiences at the BFCM do not.

The low, soft lighting evokes a calm and quiet atmosphere that causes visitors to experience the space within the self. The space encourages inner reflection and inspection of the self, and turns some visitors, like Bobby, Hank, Minh, Peggy, DeDe and Joseph, into the lone looker rather than the conversationalist who is visiting a museum with friends. As the lone looker, the rest of the visitors fall away and the people who visit the BFCM are free to experience the space on an individual level. This realization means that as far as museum education is concerned, a lot more research needs to be done on this space and others like it that evoke similar responses so that we can better serve these people who experience the space as individuals. This research should put less focus on what conversations we can have in the space and more emphasis on what it means for spaces like the BFCM to be a museum the evokes emotional responses that speak to the inner self.

Appendix A

THE MENIL COLLECTION

October 24, 2011

Dr. James Wilson, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
P.O. Box 7426
Austin, TX 78713

Dear Dr. Wilson,

The purpose of this letter is to grant Andrea Morgan, a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin permission to conduct research at the Byzantine Fresco Chapel. Her masters research thesis, "Between the Secular and the Sacred: Emotive Responses at the Byzantine Fresco Chapel," entails observation and short interviews with approximately 20 visitors between mid November and January 1, 2012. The purpose of this research is to determine the types of responses elicited by the Byzantine Fresco Chapel, which was selected because of the unique position it holds as both a secular and a sacred museum space. Ms. Morgan has agreed to share the results of her study with the Byzantine Fresco Chapel Foundation.

Sincerely,

Josef Helfenstein
Director

1511 BRANARD HOUSTON, TEXAS 77006 TEL 713-525-9400 FAX 713-525-9444

Appendix B

Consent for Participation in Research

Title: Between the Secular and the Sacred: Emotive Responses at the Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum

Introduction
The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

Purpose of the Study
You have been asked to participate in a research study about the responses people have to the Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum. The purpose of this study is to determine what kinds of responses are elicited by the Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum and how these responses effect learning? The answers to these questions will help museum educators understand the power of experience on learning in a museum environment.

What will you to be asked to do?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Answer a few short questions about your experience inside the museum space

This study will take approximately 15-30 minutes and will include approximately 15-20 study participants.

Your participation will be audio recorded. After completion of the study the audio recordings will be erased.

What are the risks involved in this study?
There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, this research will serve as a model for museum educators to facilitate visitor reflection at similar museum sites

Do you have to participate?
No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin (University) in anyway.

If you would like to participate sign the bottom of the form**.** You will receive a copy of this form.

Will there be any compensation?
You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

What are my confidentiality or privacy protections when participating in this research study?

This study is anonymous and the researcher will insure this by not asking you for any personal information, or any identifying information that will link the name on this form to the data collected in the interview process.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only the research team will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for six months and then erased. The data resulting from your participation may be used for future research or be made available to other researchers for research purposes not detailed within this consent form.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher Andrea Morgan at 512-876-6034 or send an email to morganam13@yahoo.com. This study has been reviewed and approved by The University Institutional Review Board and the study number is **[STUDY NUMBER].**

Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Signature

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

_____
Printed Name

_____ _____
Signature Date

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

_____
Print Name of Person obtaining consent

_____ _____
Signature of Person obtaining consent Date

Appendix C

Interview Questions:

Tell me about what you experienced as you walked in to the space, moved through it, and finally left the space.

Have you been to the Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum before?

Describe your mood when you entered the space.

Describe your mood when you let the space.

Describe your initial response to the space.

As you spent time inside did your experience grow or diminish?

Describe your path through the space?

Describe your movement, did you sit down or stand?

Did you like/ dislike the space?

If you are here with someone, what did you talk about in the space?

If you talked with someone inside, did you look first then speak?

How long do you think you spent inside the Chapel?

What were you thinking as you moved through the space?

How did your thoughts evolve and change as you went through the space?

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Vita

Andrea Morgan was born in 1985, in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Growing up she had always wanted to be a fashion designer, but decided in her first year of college to major in Art History instead. She received a Bachelor's degree in Art History in 2009 from The University of Texas, at Austin. The plan had been to continue onto graduate school for Art History in the hopes of one day becoming a curator, but things changed when she had a chance to be mentored by a graduate student in the Art Education program at UT. In 2010 she returned to The University of Texas, receiving a Master's degree in Art Education in 2012. After completing this thesis report and graduating from UT, Andrea began working as the Docent Program Coordinator at the Grand Rapids Art Museum, in Grand Rapids Michigan.

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This thesis was typed by Andrea Morgan.